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Persian Lamb Breeding Introduced In Gainsborough, Sask.

DR. J. FYFE AMONG THE FIRST TO INTRODUCE THE INDUSTRY IN SASKATCHEWAN

Gainsborough has the honor of being one of the first places in Saskatchewan that a Persian lamb has been born. Dr. Fyfe a few years ago purchased twenty-five head of selected Karakul sheep, at the same time providing for five different blood lines—thus giving variety and guarding against inbreeding. These sheep have proved admirably adapted for Canadian conditions, being good rustlers, healthy and hardy. Canada and the United States are heavy importers of Persian Lamb fur—the latter country importing fourteen million dollars' worth of the raw skins for Persian Lamb fur in one year. In addition to yielding valuable Persian Lamb fur, these sheep provide superior mutton. For the purchase of purebred Karakul rams or ewes or for further particulars of this new and profitable industry, apply to DR. J. FYFE, GAINSBOROUGH, SASK.

The Eastern Ontario 'Review' gives a good description of these Sheep, as follows:—

The Karakul sheep is the producer of the luxurious aristocratic fur known as Persian Lamb. Karakul sheep are fur-bearing sheep. Their native home is in Central Asia in the Province of Bokhara, a country lying between Turkistan and Afghanistan, about 600 miles east of the Caspian Sea. The name 'Karakul', as applied to the sheep, is taken from Kara Kul (Black Lake) a village in Bokhara.

This country is more or less barren with very little rainfall, the summers being very hot and dry. Vegetation is very scant. The winters are very severe with temperature often far below zero and the ground heavily covered with snow. With these extremes of climate, together with other natural causes, we find developed a very hardy type of sheep, in fact they have much in their favor to gain for themselves the title of the hardiest domestic sheep known.

ORIGIN AND DESCRIPTION

The origin of this type of sheep is somewhat obscure. Two great classes of sheep have inhabited Central and Western Asia for centuries. They belong to the fat rump and broad tailed types. The Karakul breed belong to the broad tail type and are said to have sprung from a cross between the black long-tailed Danadan (now nearly extinct) and the fat rump sheep. There are three main types of Karakul sheep, Arabi, Shiraz and Duzbai. The Arabi sheep are fur-bearing sheep supposedly from Arabia. They are not very numerous. The Shiraz Per-

sian fur sheep are gray in color and produce the valuable Krimmer fur. It is the Karakul of the Duzbai type that gives the finest and closest curl to the fur. Karakuls of the Duzbai type are large sheep, generally the rams are horned, and the ewes are hornless. The head is long and narrow and the nose very arching, being a pronounced Roman nose. The ears are medium sized and pendant. The withers are high and quite prominent. The body is somewhat long and fairly deep, the loin is broad, the rump very sloping. The tail is broad, flat and extremely fat, often weighing ten pounds in mature males. The bone is strong, clean and not too large, the mutton is of excellent quality and gamey in flavor.

The Karakul is a very hardy type of sheep. Because of its natural environment, it is well adapted to sections of extreme temperature and limited rainfall. It is of great value for crossing with range sheep and with other coarse woolled breeds. The resulting lambs are exceptionally large and strong at birth, they are very thrifty and develop rapidly, easily weighing close to 100 pounds when in a ripe condition for market. Lambs can easily be made to gain one pound a day for first sixty days. Both the purebreds and the grades are well suited for hillside land pasture, as they are good grazers, being able to make large growth on rough, scant pastures. The ewes are prolific. They breed regularly and in some cases twice a year, although this is not desirable from the standpoint of best results in maintaining vigor and size of breeds.

IMPORTATIONS

The importations of Karakul sheep to United States were first made in 1908 by Dr. C. C. Young, a native Russian and naturalized citizen. In this importation there were five rams and ten ewes. These were secured, after overcoming many difficulties at a cost of over \$25,000.00. A second lot of these sheep was brought to America by Dr. Young in the Spring of 1913. This importation consisted of eleven rams and six ewes. A third and probably the last importation of Karakuls which will ever come to America was made in 1914, consisting of fifteen rams and six ewes. In 1914 The Agnew Syndicate and Royal Investment Company of Charlestown, Prince Edward Island, also brought out a flock of Karakuls and Duzbais, which were purchased in the vicinity of old Bokhara. These left Lebau, a Russian seaport, some ten days before the city was bombarded by the Germans. For some reason the cargo of sheep was transferred to another vessel in the North Sea and, after many escapes, the vessel manned by a German crew was obliged to put into the port of St. John's, Newfoundland. The importers were unable to land this flock in Canada and it was kept in Newfoundland for two years. It numbered some 130 head of the best Persian Lamb fur flock of Bokhara and Western Turkistan. We now note that the total number of Karakuls imported by Dr. Young to the United States are fifty-three head, of this number 31 were rams and 22 ewes; altogether some 180 head have been brought to America. As there

are seven distinct blood lines, there is no fear of inbreeding. The color at birth is, in nearly every case, jet black, a color much preferred. Occasionally a lamb is born that has a white spot on the head or tail or both. At birth and up to three to five days, the lambs have a coat of very close lustrous fur. It is this fur, known as Persian Lamb fur, which is so valuable and in such demand. To be of the greatest value, the fur should show a tight curling lustrous condition and be jet black in color. The beauty of the pattern formed by irregular arrangements of the curls, and the fineness and softness of the coat also adds much to its value. The desired condition of the skin of the lamb soon disappears as it grows older. Even when two days old, the curls begin to loosen and the fleece grows in length; as the lamb nears six months the color gradually changes to grey.

FUR SHEEP INDUSTRY

The development of the fur-sheep industry in America is in its infancy and perhaps because of the fact, coupled with the great demand for Persian fur skins, the future of this new branch of sheep husbandry is very bright. There is much to be learned regarding the breeding and management of this type of sheep. Considerable knowledge has been gained about them since their first importation. Two important points stand out as quite definitely established, first that pure-bred Karakul sheep can be kept successfully and economically under Old Ontario conditions as far as climate, soil, feeding and housing are concerned; second

that pure-bred Karakul rams crossed on ewes of certain of our native sheep produce lambs of which a very large percentage possess skins that grade high as Persian Lamb fur. The demand for half blood ewes is beyond the supply. More than 100 head were sold by a New York State ranch last year at \$250 per head. The production of half bloods for fur and breeding is a growing and profitable industry. That this last point is of much concern to owners of native sheep, whether pure-bred or grade, will be manifest when we note that according to the United States Government reports the imports of the raw skins for Persian Lamb fur amounted to the enormous sum of \$14,000,000 in one year. Because of the uncertainty of the shipments from across the water, there is a great opportunity for this industry in all the sheep raising districts in America.

Because of the limited number of purebred Karakul rams and their high value, it will be advantageous to breed these rams to sheep of our Domestic Breeds. The breeds best adapted for this work are the long coarse wool breeds, especially the Black Faced Highland, Cotswold, Leicester and Lincoln. Selected Karakul rams should be used, as this will insure greater success. The work done with a large flock of Karakuls in New York State and Alberta has demonstrated that this new industry is going to be permanent and very successful.

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